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Doing Catholic Social Ethics in Spain Today

Finding a prophetic voice for the Church at the beginning of the 21st Century

Zusammenfassung

Die spanische Sozialethik ist in einer historischen Situation, in der ein schwieriges Verhältnis von Kirche und spanischem Staat vorherrscht. Nach dem Franco-Regime war die Frage der Position der Bischöfe im neuen System entscheidend, denn zunächst war eine Distanzierung der Kirche zum Staat wichtig. Der Text beleuchtet auf diesem Hintergrund die Rolle der katholischen Kirche in der spanischen Gesellschaft, die Institutionen, die katholische Sozialethik betreiben, und die aktuellen Hauptprobleme, die das Land beeinflussen. Die Bedeutung der Kirche in Spanien hängt stark an der Frage, wie ausgewogen die politischen Meinungen sein sollten und wie einheitlich das Bild erscheinen muss. Besonders stark hängt hierbei die prophetische Stimme am Verhältnis und der Haltung zur Sozialethik.

Abstract

Spanish Social Ethics are in a historical situation that is determined by a difficult relationship between Church and the Spanish Government. After the end of the Franco Regime, the position of the bishops was critical, because it was important to put distance between church and state. This is the background for this text, which looks at the role of the Catholic Church within Spanish society, the institutions that participate in formulating Catholic Social Ethics and the main social issues that affect the country. The importance of the Church in Spain is defined by the balance of political opinions and her perceived uniformity. Her prophetic voice is dependent on her relationship to and her attitude toward Social Ethics.

1 Introduction

There are three main factors influencing Catholic Social Ethics in Spain today: the social position of the Church within Spanish society; the institutions that participate in formulating Catholic Social Ethics; and the main social issues that are affecting the country. This essay discusses each of these factors, and concludes that, in spite of having performed well in the transitional years after the dictatorship of General Franco, the Catholic Church needs to change its approach to Social Ethics if it is to find its prophetic voice at the beginning of the 21st century.

2 Social Place of the Spanish Church

Catholic Social Ethics in Spain today is profoundly marked by the stance the Spanish Church has adopted with respect to Spanish society over the last 50 years. Two dates loom large when one seeks to explore this question. The first is 1965, the conclusive year of Vatican II, a milestone in the self-understanding of the Catholic Church in general. The other, the year 1975, saw the death of General Franco and the establishment of democracy in Spain under the constitutional monarchy of King Juan Carlos I. However, even at the level of Spanish history, it was 1965 that marked major changes in the Spanish social landscape and the beginning of the end of the Franco regime.

2.1 From Collaboration to Dissidence

The Spanish bishops were startled by the outcome of Vatican II. They came from a country that had been a confessional state with no separation of powers between Church and State. A preference for this arrangement explains why most of the Spanish bishops belonged to the minority within the Council that tried to obstruct the *aggiornamento* driven by documents such as *Gaudium et Spes* and *Dignitatis Humanae*. These two documents on the Church in the modern world and on the right of the person and of communities to social and civil freedom in matters of religion, radically changed the way Social Ethics was conducted in the Catholic Church (see Keenan 2010, 95–98; Mahoney 1989, 302–307). Back in Spain, some bishops had enormous difficulties applying these documents (see Montero 2009, 58–98; 101). On the other hand, these two documents – and the entire event that the Council represented – vindicated the ideas that some progressive movements such as Catholic Action had been promoting for some time in Spain (Montero 2009, 58–98; 101). One can say that, by fits and starts, from 1965 onwards the Church in Spain began to move – as the title of a history book of those years puts it – from collaboration to dissidence (see Montero 2009).

In the declining years of Franco's regime, the previously intimate and harmonious relationship with the State became more and more difficult. The most telling episode of this alienation between the Church and State was the Añoveros case. The government threatened Antonio Añoveros, bishop of Bilbao, with exile because of a homily on the peculiarities of

the Basque people. The government claimed that the homily infringed upon the unity of the state. In the end, Añoveros was not exiled. However, many years later, Vicente Enrique y Tarancón, who was at the time of the incident Archbishop and Cardinal of Madrid –tasked by Paul VI to navigate the Spanish Church towards a more open social stance – revealed how he Franco’s excommunication in his pocket, should the bishop of Bilbao be exiled.

2.2 From disestablishment to finding a new voice

By the time of Franco’s death in 1975, the Catholic Church in Spain had distanced itself from the political regime. This allowed it to play a constructive role in *la Transición*, the political transition towards democracy. Having integrated the basic teachings of Vatican II, the Spanish Bishops had renounced many of the state-supported privileges to which they had previously been accustomed to. Some recognized that, in fact, the Church had been paying a steep price for these privileges. This price had included accepting ‘the right of presentation of bishops’ On the part of the state. This right meant that the Vatican would present to the government a short list of three candidates for any vacated see. The government would then state its preferred name and the Pope would appoint this individual as bishop. It is easy to understand why the Spanish bishops would be happy to cease this practice. However, some bishops were less happy to give up various privileges they had enjoyed and to witness the progressive reduction of the social influence of the Church that ensued.

Vicente Enrique y Tarancón was the leader of the Spanish Church during this time of Spain’s *Transición* towards democracy. He was not only archbishop of Madrid but also President of the *Conferencia Episcopal Española* (CEE, Spanish Conference of Bishops). In 1975 he gave a homily during the proclamation of Juan Carlos I as King of Spain. His message was one of reconciliation in which he prayed that Juan Carlos would be king of all Spaniards, that all citizens would live in mutual love without unfair privileges, taking care to extend this love to those who held other opinions. This homily was considered to be prophetic, given that Franco’s regime that had come to power at the end of a tragic civil war, and that a new process of introducing democracy in Spain was beginning (see Carcel Ortiz 2003). In subsequent months and years, these prayers were echoed and were transformed into action by most other Spanish Bishops.

During this period, the *CEE* made a decision not to align the Church with any single political party. Consequently, unlike episcopates in Germany and Italy (thirty years earlier) they did not seek to promote a Christian Democratic party. Members of the *CEE* adopted this policy of neutrality believing that this echoed the considerable plurality of political views held by lay Catholics in the country. As a result of this and related decisions, commentators judge that the Catholic Church was a positive force for democratization in Spain (see Carcel Ortiz 2003). Some noted with respect that in doing this the Church voluntarily renounced many temporal privileges in favor of a more unencumbered preaching of the Gospel.

In recent years, the perception of the role of the Church in society has become somewhat ambivalent. Once democracy had been consolidated, the Church did not hesitate to raise her voice on a variety of social and bioethical issues. It did this knowing that it could only exercise a moral influence on public debates – no longer having the power to silence opponents. However, in some circles, such comments were considered to be a nostalgic effort to regain power the Church had lost because of the democratic transition. For this and other reasons, the Church experienced a clear erosion of its social influence, something about which the Bishops, understandably, were not happy. Some commentators note that, what happened in Spain is common elsewhere. When the Church moves from a position of exercising temporal power under an autocratic regime to exercising moral influence in a democratic government, certain members of the public tend to retain some resentment of it and to react against its continuing public influence (see Driessen 2014).

Consequently, in spite of the fact that the Church was widely recognized to have exercised a positive influence during the time of *la Transición*, its actual ability to shape opinion in the new democratic reality diminished rapidly. The bishops of Spain had to adjust to a reality where they are no longer the recognized authority in issues of Social Ethics, a position they had enjoyed for centuries. One can say that the voice of the Church remains important in Spain, but it is no longer a commanding one.

3 Teaching and Publications

Theology was expelled from Spanish universities in 1870, after *la Revolución gloriosa*, the liberal revolution of 1868. From that time on, most universities in the country were run either directly by the state or by

other levels of government (see La Cruz 1870). Catholic theology was exiled to independent faculties funded by the Catholic Church that do not receive any public financial support. In a small number of cases these faculties of theology formed part of private Catholic universities with a number of diverse faculties. However, in most cases, Catholic theology was taught in seminaries devoted to the training of priests.

3.1 Teaching Institutions

The expulsion of theological faculties from state-run Spanish universities translated into a lack of financial resources in faculties of theology compared with faculties of humanities and social sciences in public universities. The result was a certain isolation of theology as a discipline, making it harder for theologians to enter a dialogue with the humanities. In the case of Catholic Social Ethics this was a particular problem. This discipline has a particular need to work with the social sciences and with secular social ethics. This became even more obvious when *Gaudium et Spes* talked about the “autonomy of earthly affairs” (GS, 36). Social Ethics needs to understand the laws and values of every society, as deciphered by the different social sciences, to be able to speak meaningfully about social trends, values and conflicts.

There are ten Catholic Faculties of Theology in Spain. They are concentrated in the northern part of the country, with only one in the south, in Granada. It should be noted that this represents a dislocation of theological activity from where the greatest concentration of practicing Catholics and support for the Church. Andalucía, Spain's Southern region, has the largest and most active population of Catholics. In the culture of this region, the Church remains a highly valued institution (see Castón/López 2005). By contrast, in Northern Spain, and in particular in the Basque Country and Catalonia, there is a much more significant withdrawal from the Catholic Church.

Even within Northern Spain, the faculties of theology are geographically over-concentrated: two in Salamanca, two in Madrid, two in the Basque Country, and one close by in Pamplona, one in Burgos, one in Valencia and one in Barcelona. In this situation, there is a danger that theological reflection tends to occur out of contact with the experience of the local Church. Of the ten theological faculties, five are entrusted to religious orders, one to the Opus Dei and the rest depend on the

Diocesan Church. Various theological institutes and seminaries are dependent on one of these major faculties. In fact, the Pontifical University of Salamanca serves as an accrediting faculty for most of these (see González/Paradas 2015).

The numbers of students in each of the schools – whether faculties of theology or dependent diocesan institutes and seminaries – are dwindling. One result is that these schools see reduced levels of research and publishing on the part of professors. In many places, professors share their teaching responsibilities with other pastoral responsibilities, due partly to the lack of funds and the shortage of vocations. Obviously, such a situation has its drawbacks. This being said, one can also note some positive results, as when research and publishing is informed by real pastoral experience.

3.2 Publications:

In Spain, there is no periodical publication on Social Ethics from a Catholic faculty of theology, or a Catholic association of professors of Social Ethics. That in itself says something about the interest, or lack of it, in this topic at an academic level. An examination of the publications of the faculties in the last five years reveals another interesting aspect. Publications in Social Ethics occur more frequently in situations where faculties of theology, usually in a Catholic university, are in lively contact with non-theological disciplines and faculties. Three faculties of theology (Deusto, Comillas and Granada) find themselves in larger Catholic universities of this kind. These universities have faculties of economics, law, social sciences, or even a school of engineering. The fruit of such contact in publications in Social Ethics is evident.

The closest to a journal of Catholic Social Ethics that can be found in Spain is *Fomento Social*. The journal was founded in Madrid in 1946 by the Society of Jesus in order to stimulate and spread Catholic Social Teaching and Catholic Social Ethics. The journal was part of a Jesuit Writer's House, something like a Jesuit think-tank. In 1991, the seat of the journal was moved to Cordoba and it was put under the responsibility of the ETEA, a Jesuit Business School. This has given the journal a more academic tone, favoring a more interdisciplinary approach, something that reflects a similar development in Catholic Social Ethics in other countries. In this move, the journal has shifted its scope to

the social sciences, especially economics, business, sociology, politics and law, keeping always an eye on the ethical questions that all these disciplines raise.

The above-mentioned shortage of academic publications in Catholic Social Ethics is compensated to some degree by some important publications of *Caritas Española*. *Caritas Española* is a confederation of 70 diocesan *Caritas* plus three other institutions: the Society of Saint Vincent of Paul, CONFER (Spanish Conference for Religious Men and Women) and the Spanish Federation of Religious Work in Health and Social Issues. *Caritas* is by far the Spanish NGO with the largest budget. Its budget is approximately equal to that of the four next-largest NGO's put together. *Caritas* works primarily at an assistance level, practicing Christian hospitality, but it also works on a more structural level, with programs oriented to professional guidance, job recruitment and promotion of social economy (see Caritas 2017). It could be said that *Caritas* is an excellent example of Catholic Social Ethics in action. Indeed, this quality was publically recognized when *Caritas* received the Prince of Asturias Award for Concord because of its “exemplary promotion of solidarity, at a local and universal level, fighting tenaciously against injustice and poverty, and raising society’s moral conscience” (see Fundación Príncipe de Asturias 1999).

An important part of *Caritas*' contribution to raising society's moral conscience can be found in its publications. Of particular importance for Social Ethics are *Corintios XIII*, *Documentación Social*, and the annual Foessa Report. *Corintios XIII* is a quarterly publication that defines itself as a journal of theology of charity and pastoral of charity, in the service of the charitable and social activity of the Church and its agents. The journal annually publishes the minutes of the course on Catholic Social Teaching, the most important initiative in Spain in this area. An analysis of the last 10 years reveals that the issues combine contributions from professors of ecclesiastical and non-ecclesiastical academic institutions dealing with Social Ethics, along with more pastoral contributions from actors engaged in socio-pastoral ministry. The most important topic in the last ten years has been –unsurprisingly– the economic crisis that hit Spain in a dramatic way. Compared with other European countries, Spain witnessed a devastating reduction in employment and great social exclusion.

An analysis of articles in *Caritas* publications also reveals an important influence from Latin America, something that tends to be characteristic

of Spanish publications of any kind. Indeed, it is to be noted that in Spanish publications, one can usually find a much greater echo of Latin American voices than in any other European country. This is not surprising as historical ties, a common language, and an ongoing exchange of people and ideas continue to connect the two regions. A final aspect to be noted is a growing number of articles dedicated to spirituality. This is a rather new. It reveals an awareness – perhaps developing from the recognition of mistakes made in earlier decades – of the need for a strong spirituality if one is to engage in sustainable Christian, social action (see *Corintios XIII*).

Documentación Social is a journal of social studies and sociology that publishes monographs on social issues, focusing particularly on inequality and social exclusion, a field in which *Caritas* is particularly active in Spain. The annual *Foessa Report* is elaborated by the Foessa Foundation (Foessa meaning *Fomento de Estudios Sociales y Sociología Aplicada*, that is Promotion of Social Studies and Applied Sociology), created by Caritas to better understand the social reality of the country. The Foessa Foundation has been publishing reports for over 50 years, and it is the main reference in Spain on questions regarding poverty, social exclusion and the fight against both.

4 Some pressing issues

It is difficult to try to single out the most pressing issue that Social Ethics should confront in Spain today, or in the near future. The perception of what is most important tends to change regularly. To some extent, this is because the issues themselves change, but it is also because the media publicizes certain questions and keeps others in the dark. A clear example of such shifting interests in Spain is the issue of immigration. A little over ten years ago, before the economic crisis of 2007, it was perceived as one of the most important social issues in Spain. This issue no longer looms large in public consciousness, although it continues to be perceived as significant (see CIS 2007–2018). One could speculate that it will return to be a central concern before long, if the signs that Spain's economy is recovering are true.

The economic crisis of 2007, which hit Spain so dramatically, reversed the flow of migration. Many immigrants left Spain, which did not offer good jobs anymore, and many Spaniards emigrated and looked for better

lives elsewhere in Europe or Latin America. This exodus of Spaniards resumed a pattern with historic roots after a hiatus of forty years. Now expats of this period are returning home again. It is likely that soon, the number of immigrants to Spain will grow again, and that this will be perceived as a major social question.

On questions of immigration, the Church has performed impressively. In the years of greater influx, the Spanish Bishops' Conference raised its voice in favor of immigrants and refugees. It also offered vocal criticism of public administrations that failed to respect human rights. This was complemented by considerable social action as well as reflection on the theme in academic publications. Another important issue in which there was multilevel action and the voice of the Church mattered was the economic crisis. *Caritas* helped more than 3.5 million people. This assistance was coupled with reflection on Spain's socio-economic model, as well as the development of strategies to avoid social exclusion and to reintegrate those who are already excluded.

Issues of economic inequality raised broader questions of solidarity in Spanish society. On this issue the voice of the Church tended to falter. The theme of solidarity, which could be addressed with confidence to economic issues became more ambivalent when it concerned the territorial integrity of Spain. Spain is experiencing great social tension due to the division in Catalonia between those in favor of independence and those who do not favor independence. Part of the question has to do with territorial solidarity between the regions of Spain. This should not come as a surprise, for Habermas (see 2005) already warned years ago how one of the problems of contemporary democracies is the justification of solidarity among citizens and within the state. In his opinion, religion makes an important contribution to creating a sense of solidarity. However, in Catalonia the Church is as divided as the entire Catalan society. This has led the Church to remain largely silent on the issue. Recently the Basque bishops asked forgiveness for the silence they maintained about the terrorist actions of ETA, the organization that just recently announced its dissolution. The Church in Spain as a whole, and especially in Catalonia, is avoiding the question of national unity. The Church in the future might have to ask for forgiveness for its silence.

5 Conclusion

At the end of Franco's regime, the Church distanced itself from the State. At the beginning of the *Transición*, the bishops decided against supporting a Christian Democratic party. This was probably a good idea at the time, but it was also evidence of the wide difference of political opinion within the Spanish Church. Social Ethics cannot be monolithic, but a certain unity of direction is also a value. Given the scarcity of resources and the reduced influence of Catholic voices in Spanish society, it is regrettable that the Spanish Church has not been able to find a more common, and prophetic voice. Such unity of purpose is usually necessary before any local Church is capable of undertaking great acts of social reflection and creative action.

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